

TROUBLE I'VE SEEN



CHANGING THE WAY THE CHURCH VIEWS RACISM DREW G. I. HART

STUDY GUIDE BY KATELIN HANSEN

Chapter 1

WHEN YOU “FIT THE DESCRIPTION”

1. In the story that opens the book, how does Drew Hart’s experience of racism shift when his brother is arrested? Have you had a similar moment in your life?
2. Early in this chapter, Hart takes time to say the names of a few of the black women and men that have been killed by police or vigilante justice over the last couple of decades. Why was it important for him to do that?
3. How many of these names were you previously familiar with? What factors shaped your awareness and understanding of these stories?
4. In what ways did your faith community address these deaths or help you process what had happened?
5. If these incidents weren’t addressed in your church, what are the implications for its witness to its community?
6. Many Christians have been taught an ideal of “colorblind” theology (p. 21). What are the author’s arguments for why this is not sufficient?
7. What are Hart’s arguments for going beyond crosscultural exchanges as a strategy for combatting racism? What more is needed?

Chapter 2

THE RACIALIZED SOCIETY I’VE SEEN

1. What are the three different ways that Hart was perceived as a black man as he went through his young adult education?
2. Have you ever experienced being “tracked” in school, as Hart and his sister were? What put you on that track, and what did it mean for your future success?
3. In transitioning to high school, Hart suddenly became popular and was perceived as “cool,” largely due to how he was perceived as a black person. Did he benefit from these racial stereotypes? In what ways was his experience still problematic?
4. In many ways, Hart’s experience at a Christian college was the most challenging of the three educational settings he describes. What contributed to that experience for him?
5. How did the established Christian culture at his college exacerbate the racial dynamics Hart experienced? What are the lessons to be learned for predominantly white Christian campuses, and beyond?
6. How might being civil and nice actually sometimes help perpetuate racism?
7. In light of Hart’s experiences, what steps should predominantly white Christian campuses, organizations, and churches take to be more affirming and supportive of their members of color?

Chapter 3

LEAVING BEHIND THE WHITENED JESUS

1. When Jesus is depicted in your church, what race is he? What does this imply about the church's theology?
2. If Jesus had been born in the twenty-first century, what would the story have been like? Where might he have been born? Who might his parents have been? Where would they have stayed the night? Who may have come to visit them?
3. Who represents Herod in today's world? Who are the Pharisees? Who would have felt threatened by Jesus's presence?
4. Reflecting on the last two questions, how does the church of the twenty-first century fit in the mix of Jesus's narrative? What biblical characters most closely reflect the church's posture today?
5. How might you have reacted to the subversive words and actions of Jesus in his day? How do you react to words and actions that are subversive to power today?
6. In reflecting on Hart's words in the last paragraph of this chapter (p. 73), lift up the following prayer:

Jesus, help us transform how we understand and resist racism in our society. Through the Holy Spirit, help us participate in your presence in the world rather than perpetuating racism unknowingly. Help us consider how our common sense has failed to understand the world from your perspective. Help us seek a more Jesus-shaped posture from which to view race and racism in our society. Amen.

Chapter 4

DON'T GO WITH YOUR GUT

1. Hart encourages dominant-culture readers not to trust their gut instincts. Why is intuition unreliable in understanding oppression?
2. In what ways do you notice "white default" socialization in your life?
3. Hart notices that throughout U.S. history, "white socialization claimed equality and justice at every stage, while also shielding itself from its own oppressive practices and the perspective of oppressed groups" (p. 81). How does this continue to manifest today?
4. Hart questions "the capacity to which any dominant cultural group can discern an oppressive moment with even a little objectivity" (p. 82). Do you agree with his assessment? What can the dominant culture do to mitigate this issue?
5. Hart argues for the epistemological advantage of the oppressed (p. 84). What do you think he means, and what is his reasoning?
6. In what ways does being in a dominant culture hinder one's understanding of God's character?
7. Reflect on the story of Dr. Martin Luther King and his decision to move from "theory and propositions" to "an active faith in God" (p. 92). What might his example inspire in us today?
8. Reflect on the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's spiritual journey during his time in the United States. How can we live into his model in our own lives?
9. Going forward, in what ways can you challenge yourself not to go with your gut?

Chapter 5

WHITENESS MATTERS

1. Hart tells a story about “Harrisburg Invasion Day.” On the surface this might have seemed like a good and charitable plan at the time. What made it so lamentably wrong?
2. What is white identity? What are some of the characteristics of white culture, both positive and negative?
3. How and when was whiteness created? Why? What are the implications for white people today?
4. What is “white fragility,” and where does it come from?

Chapter 6

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

1. Hart observes that “being black is draining” (p. 117). Why is this? What is your own familiarity with this feeling?
2. Do you think black lives matter to the church? What about to the white church specifically? What is the evidence for and against?
3. In what ways does American society qualify the humanity of black people, especially as victims of violence?
4. What do you think it means to be socialized by antiblackness? What would it mean to “truly love black people as fully created after the image of God” (p. 125)?
5. In this chapter, Hart asks of poor black people in the United States, “who will champion them?” (p. 128). What would that championing look like in your community?
6. Hart observes that we have the tendency to scapegoat the most vulnerable among us. Do you agree, and if so, why do you think that is the case?
7. What are Jesus’s words and actions in response to oppression? What should we be saying and doing today to model ourselves after him?
8. How can the church live into its call to be an alternative to the norms of this world? What does this mean in practical terms?

Chapter 7

THE LURE OF STATUS AND RESPECT

1. Where does wealth come from?
2. Hart observes that “today racism is often much more coded and disguised” (p. 122). What standards do we use to talk about race without actually naming it?
3. What is “respectability”? How does it play out in the church? How does the notion of respectability adversely affect the work of racial equity?
4. Hart notes that “unless the church can match and exceed this level of transparency [regarding status and materialism], while turning toward gospel transformation through a renewing of our minds, we are doomed to be puppets of hidden and powerful forces” (p. 138). What does he mean, and how does it affect the work of the church?
5. What does Romans 12:1-2 mean for us in today’s racialized world? How should we respond?
6. How do we decolonize our understanding of the gospel?

Chapter 8

RENOUNCING EVERY HIERARCHY

1. Compare and contrast the histories of white imperialism and white flight in the United States.
2. How are the experiences of oppressed groups interconnected in the United States and around the world?
3. Why do conversations about race in the United States tend to focus more on black / white dynamics? Is there good reason for that, or should it be combatted?
4. Native Americans were forcibly removed from the same land that African people were forcibly brought to. How might this effect the interplay between these groups today?
5. Hart claims that “white supremacy has been the common experience everyone has encountered” (p. 147). Do you agree? How is this the case?
6. How are people of color pitted against each other? How does that affect how white people are perceived in the United States?
7. In this chapter, Hart goes through a process of understanding the experiences of other oppressed groups. Why is this important, and how do we follow his lead?

Chapter 9

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

1. Which of the author's seven recommended practices are you actively participating in right now? Which could you commit to adding into your life?
2. Hart suggests we "practice solidarity in the struggle" (p. 169). What does that look like in your community?
3. How do we actively undo the racial hierarchies in the church today?
4. Christians often state that our goal on this earth is to become more like Christ. How do we conceptualize that without ultimately supporting saviorism: the idea that "we" have the answer and can save the "other"?
5. What preparation and education has your church done since the highly publicized deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and those like them?
6. What next steps can your church take toward racial justice in this coming year?